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Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/53/41, A/53/57, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/281, A/53/311, A/53/482)

1. **Mr. Singh** (India) said that the development dimension must be taken into account in promoting the rights of the child, and stressed the need to establish a balance between protection and monitoring, on the one hand, and the development and promotional aspects of the rights of the child, on the other, which should be reflected in the relationship between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Monitoring should not be an end in itself but a tool for the promotion and development of the rights of the child.

2. His delegation welcomed the fact that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was stressing the need to comply with the standards regarding the age of recruitment, even as efforts continued to raise the permissible age. The main culprits of under-age recruitment of children were generally not Governments but non-State actors like armed rebel or insurgent groups. States which continued to recruit children under the age of 18 might have their reasons for doing so, but that did not justify the violation of those norms by non-State actors.

3. Furthermore, as indicated by the Special Representative in his report, there was a pressing need to address the question of the proliferation of weapons which could be used by children. The destruction of educational and other institutions which were important to children or adolescents, often through terrorist methods, was an important factor which reduced their training and employment opportunities. Efforts to protect the educational infrastructure, and to develop it where it did not exist, could curb the recruitment of children.

4. It was easy to exaggerate the "internal" nature of most conflicts, overlooking the fact that many of them were fomented or sustained with the human, material or diplomatic support of other countries. Pressure must be brought to bear on such actors and their mentors to observe international standards and end the brutalization of children in such conflicts. The use made of religion by some countries in order to recruit children for war was also cause for concern. Although India supported all diplomatic efforts which resulted in the better protection of children in armed conflict, it believed that great care must be taken to ensure that such efforts did not lend legitimacy to violations of the rights of children by non-State actors. Children must be at the centre of post-conflict peace-building efforts. In that respect, it was essential to revive local value systems which protected children.

5. His delegation welcomed the fact that the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had taken up issues such as the victimization of children in the judicial system and the sale or trafficking of children for purposes other than sexual exploitation. With regard to child labour, his Government remained committed to the full eradication of all forms, beginning with the most hazardous forms; that goal was part of national policy. The courts and the national human rights commission had been paying increasing attention to that issue, and India was participating in the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The problem remained serious, however, and resources were needed for rehabilitation schemes.

6. Child labour was a function of poverty and under-development, rather than a wilful violation of the rights of the child, although the distinction became blurred in the most extreme cases such as forced or bonded labour, child prostitution and so forth. The elimination of child labour required a comprehensive approach that addressed the conditions of poverty which caused and perpetuated the practice, and included solutions such as rehabilitation, alternative and remunerative employment for parents, the enforcement of legislative and administrative measures, and education and vocational training. In that respect, the outcome of the discussion on the proposed new ILO convention on the most extreme forms of child labour had been somewhat disappointing because of the lack of sensitivity about the damage which precipitate action could cause for children themselves; the neglect of the poverty dimension of the problem; an excessively broad definition as to what constituted the worst forms of child labour; inflexibility with regard to the age limit, that betrayed a lack of understanding of the circumstances of developing countries; and weak language on the obligations of the international community to assist countries which had limited means. India hoped that in the next discussions there would be more support and understanding about the causes of the problem and on how to tackle it, so that agreement could be reached on a realistic convention.

7. **Ms. Belhaj** (Tunisia) said that, since the optimal development of human resources guaranteed the protection of children, her Government had invested in the area of health and education, and had carried out various reforms based on humanitarian principles and on a deep faith in the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The importance which the President accorded to children was reflected in a development strategy which was designed to overcome poverty and meet basic needs, such as drinking water and sanitation. Over the past decade her Government had concentrated its attention on young people, who constituted two thirds of the population, and had instructed various public bodies (such as the Ministries of Youth and Children; of the Family and Women; of Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research; of Culture; of Health; and of Vocational Training and Employment) to ensure the protection of the youth sector.

8. The Constitution of Tunisia, which took into account the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and had been ratified by Tunisia under a law of November 1991, established equality of rights for children; and the Civil Code, which was periodically amended, guaranteed the welfare of children within the family. In addition, administrative measures had been adopted for the protection of the freedom of children: they included the establishment of a council for children; the designation of 11 January as national children's day; the establishment of the "President of the Republic" prize to honour contributions in the sphere of children's rights; and the formulation of a charter for the protection of children, in 1995.

9. Great improvements had also been made in the health services for mothers and children, as was demonstrated by the fact that the World Health Organization had awarded Tunisia the "Health for All" Gold Medal in 1996. Infant mortality had fallen from 6.5 per 1,000 in 1985 to 5.3 per 1,000 in 1997. In the sphere of education, the State provided for children at all stages of their development, and education was compulsory and free between the ages of 6 and 16. In the social sphere, welfare programmes had been expanded and the fight against poverty had been intensified with the establishment of the 26-26 national solidarity fund, which had benefited families in general, and children in particular.

10. The State of Tunisia, in cooperation with civil society, was ensuring the development of children in the sphere of culture and sports by establishing sports clubs and facilities and libraries throughout the country, and by promoting associations to assist children and plans of work in that sphere. The President's strong commitment to the implementation of all those measures was reflected in the formulation of a report on the situation of children in Tunisia which was submitted every year to the Council of Ministers on the occasion of national children's day.

11. **Mr. Nuanthasing** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, despite the measures taken at the national and international levels, the situation of millions of children in many parts of the world remained critical, as a result of poverty, armed conflict, sexual exploitation, child labour, famine, disease and natural disasters. The nearly universal adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was an important achievement, but the States Parties had to put the Convention into practice at the national level. It was to be hoped that the international community would assist countries with limited resources in their efforts to fulfil their obligations.

12. His Government was strongly committed to the promotion and protection of the rights of Lao children. For that purpose, a national commission for mothers and children had been established in 1992, and reorganized in 1996; its mandate covered all aspects of the Convention. Despite inadequate resources, the commission was doing everything possible to accomplish its difficult task. Child labour had become a serious problem, which according to ILO affected some 250 million children around the world. In order to achieve progress in that sphere, concerted action was needed, and cooperation at all levels; the Lao People's Democratic Republic supported the formulation of an ILO convention to eliminate the most extreme forms of child labour. The root cause of the phenomenon was poverty; his Government had therefore formulated a socio-economic development programme to the year 2000 focusing on poverty eradication, and an "education for all" plan concentrating on children in rural or remote areas. The Lao People's Democratic Republic supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, who had visited the country in September 1998.

13. It was well known that for nine years (from 1964 to 1973) Laos had experienced the heaviest aerial bombardment in world history, in the course of which over two million tons of bombs had been dropped. Twenty-four years since the end of the war, those deadly explosives continued to kill innocent people, especially children. In order to address the issue, his Government, with the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, had established a trust fund for the removal of unexploded ordinances, in order to finance a nationwide programme which included awareness activities and clearance operations, and was being successfully implemented. The task was enormous, however, and the Lao People's Democratic Republic needed the cooperation and support

of the international community to accomplish that objective, and to promote and protect the rights of children.

14. **Ms. Aponte de Zacklin** (Venezuela) said that, despite the progress made, violations of children's rights were continuing to occur in all regions of the world; her delegation was deeply concerned about the situation with regard to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; child labour and its close relationship with poverty, especially in the developing and least developed countries; and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, which must be combatted more visibly and with firm political will.

15. Venezuela had always been a firm supporter of children's rights; in that respect, it was following a course of reviewing the existing legislation on the family and minors and promoting education and training. The Venezuelan laws on the protection of minors contained provisions on the protection of children's rights which were consistent with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Venezuela in 1990. In addition, Venezuela had made a significant effort to adapt its legislation to the principles of the child custody and adoption convention. In 1996 it had ratified the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, the Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoptions and the Inter-American Convention on the Repatriation of Minors.

16. Venezuela was aware, however, that in order to make real progress in achieving children's rights, what was necessary, in addition to unflinching political will, was cooperation at all levels and the organized coordination of civil society in general.

17. **Mr. Shihab** (Maldives) said that since human rights were universal in character, they must be applied with equal force, irrespective of sex, creed, colour or economic status. Unfortunately, the reality was very different, and in practice it did matter whether a child was male or female, whether the child had been born in a developed or a developing country, in a war zone or in a land of peace, and what ethnic group the child belonged to. The gap between aims and achievements was scandalous.

18. There was no earthly reason why millions of children should suffer. It was not enough to say that those children had been born into misery or poverty, or were victims of the ravages of war. Nor could the blame be laid on overpopulation or insufficient resources. It was more likely that the cause of all that suffering was gross inequalities in the use of the world's resources and wasteful expenditure on expensive armaments and other national vanities. The children of the world could not empower themselves; it was therefore necessary to do everything possible to ensure that their rights were respected.

19. His Government attached high priority to child welfare and the protection of children's rights. Over 40 per cent of the national budget was spent on education and health services, and the beneficiaries were mostly children. Enrolment in primary education was nearly 98 per cent and near-universal immunization had been achieved against the four major childhood diseases. There was no gender bias in access to schooling. The infant mortality rate had declined from 95 per 1,000 in 1980 to 27 per 1,000 in 1997 and there were virtually no cases of poliomyelitis or neo-natal tetanus.

20. In 1991, a national council for the protection of the rights of the child had been established; it was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the national plan of action for children, which had been drawn up in accordance with the national law on the rights of the child enacted pursuant to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 1993, a unit for the rights of the child had been established to implement the national plan of action for children. The unit trained counsellors to help children in difficult circumstances and disabled children. At the same time, awareness-raising campaigns were being conducted throughout the country through the mass media, and regional workshops on the rights of the child and the importance of their welfare were being organized. In 1997 a hotline had been established to provide assistance and guidance with regard to children's matters.

21. Following a call by President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom at the fifth summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Maldives had begun working with other members of the Association to draw up a convention on regional arrangements to protect children's rights. It was expected that the convention would be signed at the next summit meeting of the Association. The Maldives believed that the convention would make an important contribution to the achievement of the goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the region.

22. The Maldives had achieved generally favourable conditions for its children. However, there were many pressing social problems, most of which were related to the social stresses deriving from the country's rapid economic development. A high divorce rate, drug abuse, and juvenile delinquency were matters of serious concern. A new family law, which was expected to be passed soon, would address many of those problems.

23. As a small country with limited resources, the Maldives was handicapped in overcoming the challenges of

development. Moreover, given the wide dispersal of the population, the unit costs of programmes and services were unusually high. To date, his Government had worked closely with donor countries and agencies in raising the standard of living. Children had been the major beneficiaries in that partnership. The Maldives had not squandered its own resources or those of donors.

24. Cooperation was necessary in order to overcome developmental challenges, since there was an ineluctable link between human rights and development. If the world community wanted to ensure that children were able to enjoy their rights, it needed to invest in those rights now.

25. **Mr. Arda** (Turkey) said that throughout the history of Turkey, children had always held a privileged place in Turkish society. The establishment of educational and health institutions by individuals had always been well-received. A milestone in the process of providing better education to the children of Turkey had been his Government's recent extension of free, compulsory primary education from 5 years to 8 years, as a first step towards extending compulsory education to 12 years. That reorganization included, *inter alia*, a reduction in class size, the improvement of sports infrastructures, the extension of computer-supported education to all schools, and the teaching of at least one foreign language starting from fourth grade with the help of audiovisual laboratories. The last two years of the educational curriculum included civics education and human rights courses. Since the project would serve about 10 million students, immense financial and human resources needed to be mobilized. Besides the financing envisaged in the relevant regulations, considerable amounts were being obtained through voluntary contributions from individuals, institutions and the private sector. The World Bank had also provided financial support for the project.

26. Turkey believed that it was important to consider the Convention on the Rights of the Child not as a mere political declaration but as an international tool to promote activities for the benefit of children. Governments bore primary responsibility for implementing the provisions of the Convention, but international cooperation, as indicated in article 4, was of fundamental importance. In that respect, Turkey appreciated the unceasing work of UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Health Organization (WHO), ILO and other organizations in their areas of expertise; Turkey was proud to participate in those activities and support them.

27. Turkey also supported the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and hoped that the working group on the draft optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would soon complete a text. The work of the Special Rapporteur of the Secretary-General on that issue was also instrumental in enabling the working group to reach agreement. His Government would thoroughly consider the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur. Turkey also hoped that the working group on the draft optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflicts would soon complete its work and present a text for adoption. Both protocols would help create a better future for children.

28. Turkey had studied the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General entitled "Protection of children affected by armed conflict"; that report, along with the outcome of the debate in the Security Council, gave a comprehensive overview of the tasks that lay ahead. Both the report and the Statement by the President of the Security Council stressed the role of non-State actors. Another matter of special concern was the exposure of children to the culture of violence during situations of armed conflict, and their exposure to the propaganda of violence and hate during times of peace, by State and non-State actors. The promotion of tolerance and peace among children, instead of violence and hatred, would undoubtedly contribute to unleashing the creative energy that was inherent in every child.

29. **Mr. Afshari** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation was pleased to note that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been adopted by all States but two and hoped that universal adherence would be achieved in time for the tenth anniversary of the World Summit for Children. It believed that the reservations made by States Parties to some provisions of the Convention fell within their areas of jurisdiction and, as long as those reservations were not contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention, they should be considered acceptable by the other Parties. Moreover, the increase in the membership of the Committee on the Rights of the Child to 18 experts would enhance the Committee's efficiency in monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

30. As a Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child since early 1994 and in fulfilment of its commitments for the effective realization of the objectives set forth in it, the Islamic Republic of Iran had embarked on a series of initiatives within the framework of its second five-year development plan. Recently, the welfare organization had been designated as the focal point for the coordination of

national efforts for the implementation of the Convention and the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

31. With regard to the right to education, concrete measures had been taken to ensure that all children aged 6 to 10 would be registered and sent to school by the end of the plan, in the year 2000. Enrolment currently stood at 98.6 per cent, of which 48 per cent were girls. Primary education was compulsory and free, and had recently been extended to nine years of compulsory schooling.

32. Since the enactment of proper legislation to protect children was essential to their healthy physical, mental and psychological development, Iran had adopted certain legal measures, including the establishment of special courts to protect the family, and had modified article 1173 of the civil code regarding child custody to recognize the mother's role in guardianship.

33. Iran welcomed the increased attention that was being given to the sexual exploitation of children, including the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, since that had heightened awareness of the problem of the sale or trafficking of children for those purposes. It noted with concern, however, the inadequacy of the current legal regime and the mechanisms which purported to address such atrocities.

34. The use of children in illegal activities such as drug trafficking was a matter of international concern. In that respect, his delegation acknowledged the important role and special responsibility of the family, the school authorities and drug control organizations in preventing the involvement of children and youth in drug-related crimes.

35. Iran was deeply concerned about the alarming rate of child prostitution, sex tourism, and child trafficking for sexual exploitation and other purposes. In that respect, it was particularly concerned about the impact of pornography on children. The Committee must pay due attention to all those problems and adopt appropriate decisions in that regard.

36. Iran was deeply distressed that children were currently suffering from the effects of conflicts and their repercussions in 50 countries around the world. In that context, it continued to be concerned about the damaging effects of armed conflict on Afghan children, who were the victims of incessant hostilities and abhorrent treatment by the Taliban on ethnic and religious grounds. There was an urgent need to speak up on behalf of those children, whose life and rights had been and were being violated. The provisions laid down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child applied equally in situations of armed conflict and in times of peace, but the value of those provisions depended on the extent to which they were applied. The international community must ensure that those who targeted children did not continue to do so with impunity.

37. **Ms. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that her delegation endorsed the statement made by the representative of Panama on behalf of the countries of the Rio Group. Referring to the report submitted by her Government in September 1996 to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in implementation of article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, she said that, since 1996, much had changed in Ecuador. In that respect, she drew attention to article 48 of the Political Constitution of Ecuador which stated the following: "It is the obligation of the State, society and the family to promote the full development of children and adolescents as a maximum priority and to ensure the full exercise of their rights. In all cases the principle of the higher interests of the child shall be applied, and children's rights shall take precedence over the rights of others".

38. That article named three agents, since the State could not and should not have sole responsibility for the protection of children's rights; it was not enough to adopt laws or change judicial systems, since the cooperation of the community was essential. In that respect, the most recent initiatives to help Ecuadorian children involved joint work carried out by, among others, the permanent forum of organizations for and on behalf of boys, girls and adolescents, the programme for the working child, pro-justicia, the national institute for the child and the family, the Ministry of Social Welfare, International Children's Defence, Ecuador chapter, the national council for the modernization of the state, and UNICEF; all those bodies were responsible for programmes involving civic action, working children, childhood, the family, child development, medical care, and information on children and the family, among other issues.

39. As long as there was poverty, children, especially girls, would continue to be the ones to suffer most. As the President of Ecuador had recently affirmed at the plenary session of the General Assembly, children's rights were the most important human rights and, along with other rights, were the basis of international peace, development and cooperation. Ecuador therefore reaffirmed its commitment to combat extreme poverty and promote human rights in general, and children's rights in particular.

40. Ecuador had been the first country in Latin America to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as a demonstration of the values of its society, in which the family and children held a special place; its objective was

to convert that national sentiment into concrete actions and programmes.

41. Her delegation reiterated its support for the work of UNICEF and was following with great interest the plan to include in delegations attending the sessions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child at least three children from the country whose report was to be considered. Ecuador was also studying the possibility of children participating in the preparation of the national reports, since their opinions were important. If children were allowed to exercise their rights and were helped towards healthy and normal physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development, when they grew up they would practice tolerance and value peace.

42. **Ms. Eshmambetova** (Kyrgyzstan) said that in the modern world, which was characterized by a crisis of values and instability, children were exposed more than ever before to brutal violence. Against that backdrop, the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a Special Representative who would promote the prevention, protection and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflicts was very timely.

43. One of the key elements for a strong advocacy role of the Special Representative was the issue of children's rights, which were being flagrantly violated by warring factions. The question of the protection of children's rights in armed conflicts should therefore be a major concern in all the relevant fora. The establishment of the International Criminal Court had significantly reinforced advocacy for children targeted in armed conflicts, as the court had been given jurisdiction over cases of rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization, which were defined in the Statute of the Tribunal as crimes against humanity.

44. Although armed conflicts affected all members of society, children were often the first victims. It was therefore necessary to enhance "silent diplomacy" so as to prevent disputes from turning into conflicts. In addition, since children affected by war were a major source of unrest and instability, the children's dimension was important not only from the humanitarian aspect, but also from the perspective of world peace and security. In that regard, Kyrgyzstan commended the statement by the President of the Security Council in relation to the item entitled "Children and armed conflict" (S/PRST/1998/18) and urged the Council to give priority to the issue whenever it considered specific crises and to keep it in mind when considering the dispatch of peacekeeping missions, the imposition of sanctions, the terms of peace accords and human rights violations.

45. Kyrgyzstan took note with satisfaction of the visits made by the Special Representative to a number of war-stricken countries and had noted with special interest his report on his visit to Afghanistan, in which he had not only pinpointed the main problems affecting children in that country, but also identified future initiatives. Since children represented the future of every society, the enormous problems faced by the children of Afghanistan made the future of that country problematic. The absence of the United Nations from the field exacerbated the situation, and Kyrgyzstan therefore urgently appealed to the warring factions to guarantee the delivery of humanitarian aid and the provision of basic services, such as health and education, to children. The value system of Afghan society could also be invoked in order to achieve those objectives.

46. **Ms. Majali** (Jordan) said that a child's right to life did not mean the right to live just any type of life, but the right to be a child and to have a safe childhood. In that context, Jordan welcomed the nearly universal adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was fully committed to the protection and promotion of those rights. In July 1998, Jordan had submitted its second report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in accordance with article 44 of the Convention.

47. For Jordan, meeting the needs of Jordanian children and upholding their rights was a development priority. In 1995, the national task force for children, a national coalition which included the public and private sectors, the relevant ministries, non-governmental organizations, international agencies and dedicated individuals, had been established by royal decree. The task force was working to coordinate and consolidate all national efforts in the field of child development and child welfare, and to promote and monitor the implementation of the two conventions on children's rights signed by Jordan and the national plan of action. One of the results had been a revision of Jordanian law in that sphere. The new child law covered the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Arab Convention on the Rights of the Child. The law was currently being revised, and would be signed and ratified in 1998.

48. In December 1997, the working group had established a national coalition for children, with a total of 500 members, and an information, communications and education unit to raise public awareness of child rights and the related conventions and provide training programmes in that field. A research and database unit had also been established to collect and evaluate information about unmet requirements and establish child protection programmes. A study, commissioned by the International Programme on the

Elimination of Child Labour, had also been conducted, in order to explore and assess the reasons for and consequences of child labour in Jordan. That study had resulted in a plan of action to protect children from economic exploitation and from performing work which could be hazardous or interfere with their education and development.

49. Jordan deplored the violation of children's rights and condemned their commercial and sexual exploitation, as well as child pornography. Recently, it had taken steps to combat domestic violence against women and children. To that end, it had established two family units in the directorate of general security and in the Ministry of the Interior. It had also held seminars, training courses and workshops to raise awareness of that kind of violence and to train police officers, doctors and nurses in how to treat the victims. Since 1994, work had been underway to formulate a framework for the new national plan for the family that would take up those issues, among others.

50. Jordan was committed to international humanitarian law and to the related international instruments and reiterated its condemnation of all forms of violence perpetrated against women and children in armed conflicts. That concern had been demonstrated by the numerous appeals made by the Prince Regent to the international community to strengthen the norms of protection in that sphere. Jordan therefore welcomed the recent inclusion of the use of child soldiers in the statute of the International Criminal Tribunal, since it believed that it was important to enforce the norms on the minimum age for recruitment. Jordanian legislation established a minimum age of recruitment of 16 years. Jordan also welcomed the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflicts; it was of the utmost importance to conclude an agreement defining the minimum age of recruitment.

51. Jordan, which had recently signed the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, was fully committed to helping eliminate those inhumane weapons, which contravened international law. In that respect, she referred to the work of Queen Noor of Jordan, who was the patron of the Landmine Survivors Network and was leading the worldwide campaign to eliminate those weapons. Jordan, which in July 1998 had organized the first conference in the Middle East on landmine injuries, took advantage of the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to exhort all countries to take a solemn pledge to protect and promote the fundamental right of children to a normal and wholesome childhood.

52. **Ms. Hadar** (Israel) commended the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict, which were sobering. It was horrifying to learn that such evil still existed, even after 50 years of efforts in the area of human rights. The support given to such barbaric practices by those with economic means engendered doubts about whether the world had ever really progressed beyond the basest level of moral corruption. The millions of cases of children who had been sexually exploited or deprived of nourishment, freedom or basic human dignity which were described in the UNICEF report were too sickening to be ignored. Israel also reacted with pain at the thought of the many children who were being flung into the brutality of war and death, or becoming maimed or permanently scarred, without ever knowing a normal childhood. As a nation with a centuries-old tradition of cherishing children and sharing in the plight of others, Israel could not turn away from that awful tragedy.

53. Israel had all the more reason to do everything it could to maintain and improve the welfare of children in its own country, for which purpose it had built a safety net to protect all those whose fundamental rights were threatened. To that end, the national council for child welfare, a non-governmental organization, had been established in 1979; it acted as a defence counsel for all children in Israel, especially those whose rights had been violated or whose safety and welfare had been jeopardized. The national council had two branches, the centre for the child and the law, and the children and youth ombudsman, and pursued five main objectives: promotion of children's rights; formulation of child welfare policy and introduction of new legislation; appointment of an ombudsman to protect the rights of children and teenagers; review of the services for children and identification of defects in them; and prevention of attacks on children and their exploitation by adults. The council had become part and parcel of Israeli society and continued to work closely with the legislative branch, Government offices and local authorities, national volunteer groups, research centres and schools. Furthermore, although the council maintained constant ties with UNICEF and other international bodies, it endeavoured to remain totally independent and, as such, did not accept Government assistance.

54. The council had achieved some outstanding changes both in the area of policy and in the realm of public awareness. In the area of policy, it had undertaken legislative initiatives to make amendments to the law on sexual offences against minors, prohibit the interrogation of minors without

the presence of a parent, lay the groundwork for a fosterage law, and make amendments to the national insurance law to benefit handicapped children. In the sphere of public awareness, several programmes had been developed covering violence in schools, exploitation and deception in child modelling agencies, and the effects of accidents suffered by children, both within and outside the home.

55. The success of those programmes had led to an increase in the number of cases in the Arab sector, where parents, professionals and even children were reporting dangerous situations within the home, sexual abuse, the absence of a suitable educational framework, school failure, violence against students, the absence of insurance rights, divorce, child custody and so forth.

56. The work of the Ombudsman's office had expanded dramatically, from 250 cases in 1990 to 8,000 cases in 1997. More and more children were appealing directly to that office, thanks to a vigorous publicity campaign which had let children know that they had somewhere to turn. One of the bodies available to children was the law project for the representation of children, an integral part of the centre for the child and the law, which consisted of a team of lawyers and psychologists who acted on behalf of children and their rights. In 1997, for example, 35 children had been represented by the project.

57. As a leader in communications technology, Israel was aware of the hazards posed by the media in promoting violence against children. The council had begun to campaign against television shows, advertisements and computer software which encouraged violence. That campaign had gained new urgency because of the surge in child pornography, exploitation and worse on the Internet. Since that was a global problem, Israel joined the international community in its concern about the use of the Internet to exploit children.

58. **Mr. Al-Marri** (Qatar) expressed surprise about the content of paragraph 69 of the report of the Special Rapporteur (A/53/311), which was clearly false and without any foundation. In that respect, he wished to make some comments. First, Qatar had an excellent human rights record, as had been recognized by the competent bodies. Qatar's firm commitment to human rights in general, and to the rights of the child in particular, enabled it to affirm proudly that it had recently been reelected as a member of the Commission on Human Rights. Second, the legislation of Qatar prohibited the employment of minors. Moreover, camel races were a popular and traditional sport in Qatar, like horse racing in other countries, and had well-defined rules. Third, he condemned the reference made to Qatar in the report and said that it would have been preferable to refer to the members of the bands which trafficked in children and indicate their nationality, so as to draw attention to the culprits who needed to be extradited so as to put an end to that traffic.

59. **Mr. Mohd Isa** (Malaysia) said that Malaysia attached great importance to the protection and development of children in society and strongly believed that while Governments ultimately had responsibility for formulating legislation, plans and programmes, all countries must collaborate to combat any illegal, exploitative and immoral activities which had a direct impact on children. That task should be very difficult, since there was near universal acceptance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the existence of strong political will did not diminish the magnitude or complexity of the problem. In order to overcome the problems affecting children, serious efforts must be made.

60. Immediate attention must be given to the question of children in armed conflicts. In that respect, his delegation fully supported the Special Representative's recommendations and the efforts to promote the rights and welfare of children in situations of armed conflict through regional activities. In particular, it welcomed the series of regional symposia intended mainly for Asian countries, including the symposium to be organized by Japan at the end of 1998. Malaysia also fully supported the recent consideration of the item entitled "Children and armed conflict" by the Security Council, and hoped that the Council would continue to regard it as a matter of grave and continuing concern.

61. His delegation was strongly opposed to the direct participation of children in armed conflicts and was therefore in favour of raising the legal age for recruitment and for the participation of children in hostilities from 15 to 18 years.

62. His delegation also condemned all forms of sexual exploitation of children, including the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. At the national level, laws had long ago been enacted and enforced to deal with those criminal activities. At the international level, since the networks of the perpetrators had spread beyond national borders, especially through the new technology, cooperation was needed to combat those activities.

63. In that respect, his delegation supported the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and agreed that control should be exercised to prevent the spread of child pornography through the Internet. In addition, it believed that Governments, in cooperation with intergovernmental

and non-governmental organizations and the private sector, should formulate measures to prevent or restrict the use of cyberspace technology for child pornography.

64. As a State Party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Malaysia was committed to improving the situation of children at the domestic level, and for that purpose had promulgated laws and formulated programmes, such as the seventh Malaysia plan, designed to further improve the education system, inculcate good values among children and parents and create a society in which care and love for children were given strong emphasis.

65. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the wild accusations made on the previous day by the delegation of Ethiopia were totally false and unfounded. Eritrea was not the aggressor, but the victim of Ethiopia's policy of expansionist aggression and human rights violations. It was Ethiopia which had crossed the internationally recognized border to attack the Eritrean forces, and which had invaded Eritrea on two occasions, in July 1997 and May 1998; it was Ethiopia which had made a surprise attack on Asmara international airport in June 1998, killing at least 46 innocent civilians and wounding many others, including women and children; it was Ethiopia which had attacked Eritrea at several points on the border after its Prime Minister had declared war on Eritrea; it was Ethiopia which had informed the world that it had blockaded Eritrean ports and airports. All those acts, which constituted aggression according to international law, were verifiable by independent third parties. The Ethiopian delegation could not deny those acts or deny that the Ethiopian Government was still threatening Eritrea with war unless it withdrew from territory which belonged to it within internationally recognized borders.

66. The Government and people of Eritrea, which had fought to liberate their territory from Ethiopian colonial subjugation, knew very well that children were vulnerable victims of war since they had lost thousands of children because of the nerve gas, napalm and cluster bombs with which the Ethiopians had attacked Eritrean territory. It was therefore inconceivable that Eritreans would act like the Ethiopians and commit such atrocious crimes. Although it was true that some civilians had been killed in the conflict, the Government of Ethiopia was entirely responsible. While his Government had immediately extended condolences to the bereaved families, the Ethiopian Government had admitted large numbers of civilians to the military airports to welcome back the pilots returning from their raids. His delegation once again invited United Nations bodies to visit the territory and investigate the situation.

67. **Ms. Sinegiorgis** (Ethiopia), said that despite everything that the Eritrean delegation had just said, it was the Eritrean Government that had unleashed unprovoked aggression against Ethiopia and deliberately chosen civilian targets. The Eritrean air force had bombed an elementary school in the city of Mekele in June 1998, in broad daylight, while students were in their classrooms. That premeditated attack, which had been witnessed by international news media, had not been a retaliatory attack. Despite its lies, the delegation of Eritrea could not change the facts. And while it was true that the people of Eritrea might have felt sorrow and disapproval of the indiscriminate killings and maiming of children, the Government of Eritrea had never shown any remorse for its crimes; instead, the President of Eritrea himself had said that war had no rules and that indiscriminate killings of civilians were inevitable and justifiable in times of war. It was evident, therefore, that the Government of Eritrea was disregarding the 1949 Geneva Convention and the two additional protocols, as well as international law.

68. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) said that no absurd accusation could change reality; he challenged the Ethiopian delegation to deny that its Prime Minister had declared war and imposed a blockade against Eritrea and to produce evidence obtained from an independent third party of the bombing of schools, and a written text which included the phrase about war which he had attributed to the President of Eritrea. Eritrea, however, did have evidence that the Prime Minister of Ethiopia had declared war against Eritrea, in an interview granted to the media.

69. **Ms. Sinegiorgis** (Ethiopia) denied those points and said that her Prime Minister had not declared war but had authorized a retaliatory attack. Furthermore, the Government of Eritrea had admitted that it had attacked civilian targets such as a pharmaceutical factory. As to the Eritrean delegation's reference to an independent third party, she stressed that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had already requested Eritrea to withdraw from Ethiopian territory and accept the recommendations made by the facilitators of the negotiations.

70. **Mr. Tekle** (Eritrea) stressed that the Committee should consider only social issues and that political issues should be taken up in another forum.

71. **Ms. Sinegiorgis** (Ethiopia) said that OAU had declared that the territory in question was Ethiopian territory and that the Eritrean forces had occupied it.

72. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 106.

Agenda item 103: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/C.3/53/L.10, L.11, L.12 and L.13)

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.10

73. **Ms. Lacanlale** (Philippines), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.10 entitled "Traffic in women and girls" on behalf of the sponsors, who had been joined by Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, China, Colombia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Ireland, Namibia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Norway, Peru, Poland, Sweden, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay and Viet Nam, drew attention to the main aspects of the draft resolution and said that it incorporated recommendations made by the functional commissions and by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Trafficking in women and girls" (A/53/409). The issue would be considered on a biennial basis because States would need time to implement the provisions of the draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.11

74. **Mr. Berteling** (Netherlands), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.11 entitled "Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls" on behalf of the sponsors, who had been joined by Botswana, Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Hungary, Israel, Lesotho, Liberia, Lithuania, Nicaragua and Nigeria, drew attention to the main aspects of the draft resolution and said that he hoped that it would be adopted in order to promote to the elimination of traditional practices which affected the health of women and girls and thereby help improve women's status and health and contribute to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.12

75. **Ms. Eckey** (Norway), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.12 entitled "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women", said that the draft resolution had not yet been finalized and that a revised version would be issued later. She also announced that the sponsors of the draft resolution were: Argentina, Bolivia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Panama, the Philippines, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

76. **The Chairman** announced that Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Congo, Costa Rica, Croatia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, El Salvador, Fiji, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Malawi, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, Turkmenistan, Venezuela and Zambia had become sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.12.

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.13

77. **Ms. Kerr** (Australia) introduced the draft resolution entitled "Improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat" on behalf of the sponsors, who had been joined by Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Cameroon, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ethiopia, France, Guyana, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Netherlands, San Marino, Slovenia, the Solomon Islands, Sweden, Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Viet Nam.

78. **The Chairman** announced that Bolivia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Jamaica, Micronesia, Mozambique, the Republic of Moldova, Singapore and Trinidad and Tobago had become sponsors of draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.13.

Agenda item 101: Crime prevention and criminal justice (*continued*) (A/C.3/53/L.8, A/C.3/53/L.9)

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.8

79. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.8 entitled "United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders", which had no programme budget implications.

80. **Mr. Aliyu** (Nigeria), speaking on behalf of the sponsors, suggested that the last part of paragraph 6 should be deleted, so that the paragraph would read: "Calls upon the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme to work closely with the Institute and, in particular, to provide the necessary financial and technical support".

81. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.8, as orally revised, was adopted.*

82. **Mr. Shapiro** (United States of America) said that, in view of the amendment made to paragraph 6, his delegation wished to become a sponsor of the draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.9

83. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take action on draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.9 entitled "Strengthening the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

Programme, in particular its technical cooperation capacity", which had no programme budget implications. He recalled that, when the draft resolution had been introduced, Australia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, France, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Malta and Sweden had become sponsors.

84. **Ms. Newell** (Secretary of the Committee) read out oral revisions made by the delegation of Italy during the introduction of the draft resolution. In paragraph 7, the words "*Expresses* its appreciation to the civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations" should be changed to "*Expresses* its appreciation to non-governmental organizations and other relevant sectors of civil society". In paragraph 13, the words "the main text of the Convention, as well as of" should be inserted between the words "drafting of" and "international instruments", so that the phrase would read as follows: "to devote attention to the drafting of the main text of the Convention as well as of international instruments".

85. **Mr. Bussaca** (Italy) said that Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Congo, Jamaica, Mongolia, Panama and Poland had become sponsors of the draft resolution. He also announced a small additional amendment which had been made to the draft resolution following consultations with some delegations. The fourth line of paragraph 13, as indicated by the Chairman, would now read "attention to the drafting of the main text of the convention as well as of international instruments". He proposed that the words "as appropriate" should be added after the words "main text of the convention". That part of the sentence would then read: "attention to the drafting of the main text of the convention, as well as, as appropriate, of international instruments".

86. **The Chairman** said that Barbados, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Colombia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Fiji, Guyana, Liberia, the Solomon Islands, Togo and Trinidad and Tobago had become sponsors of the draft resolution, as orally revised.

87. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.9, as orally revised, was adopted.*

88. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 101.

Agenda item 102: International drug control (*continued*)

Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.7 entitled "International cooperation against the world drug problem"

89. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications. He recalled that at the time of the introduction of the draft resolution, it had been announced that in addition to the sponsors listed in the document containing the draft resolution, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Dominican Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Namibia and Zambia had also become sponsors.

90. **Ms. García Verastegui** (Mexico) said that Cape Verde, Congo, Guinea, Pakistan, the Philippines, San Marino, Senegal and Uzbekistan had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

91. **The Chairman** said that Benin, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Guyana, Israel, Liberia, Lesotho, Mali, Nepal, Rwanda, the Solomon Islands, Togo and Viet Nam had become sponsors of the draft resolution.

92. *Draft resolution A/C.3/53/L.7 was adopted.*

93. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 102.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.